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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2016

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: BAKASSI FREEDOM FIGHTERS, IN LEAGUE WITH MEND, SHOW THEIR STRENGTH

REF: A) SEPTEL B) LAGOS 243 C) LAGOS 224

Classified By: Consul General Donna Blair, Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Dr. Theo Osin Oyuko (protect throughout), Executive Director of the Cross River State Youth Assembly, told Pol-Econ Chief July 10 that youths from the southern Bakassi peninsula, calling themselves Bakassi Freedom Fighters, put on a show of force near the village of Ikang around mid-day July 9. According to Oyuko, the youths have allied themselves with the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta and have access to "massive amounts" of arms, which they displayed on July 9. Oyuko said that his source told him the Bakassi Freedom Fighters met with Nigerian security forces, briefly "took them hostage," then released them near the beach. The whole operation was a test run, he said, to show their strength. The youths have some powerful backers willing to give them money, he added. Asked if the "operation" caused any population displacement, Oyuko replied in the negative; the people who were in the area were only fishermen, and were not forced to leave. According to Oyuko's source, the youths are determined to fight against the final turnover of Bakassi on August 14. The youths have also discussed the possibility of creating an oil spill in the ocean offshore from the peninsula, and setting it alight. By causing a panic, Oyuko said, they hope to derail the handover.

¶2. (C) During a July 12 graduation ceremony for militants trained in nonviolence principles and practices by the Foundation for Ethnic Harmony, at which Pol-Econ Chief was in attendance (Septel), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Managing Director Timi Alaibe seemed to confirm the link between Niger Delta militants and the Bakassi Freedom Fighters, telling the youths he knows how they travel from Port Harcourt to Bakassi, "spending three hours on the sea, with six drums of fuel for your boats."

¶3. (C) Comment: That disgruntled youths opposed to the handover reached out to or were reached out to by, Niger Delta militants is not surprising. The Bakassi handover may prove a fertile recruiting for new militants with a fresh set of grievances and a high profile "cause."

BLAIR